

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Reformation & Revival* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ref-rev-01.php

Reformation
& Revival



A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

Volume 4, Number 1 • Winter 1995

There's a strange verse in Acts—strange because it shows us the nearly indiscernible blend between spiritual warfare and common life which confronts the Christian at every turn. It is the verse in which Peter says, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” (5:3). Peter almost seems to be asking Ananias why he was a victim of a satanic device. But the idea that “the Devil made him do it” was not an excuse. In fact, it cost him his life. Ananias, whether he knew it or not, allowed his heart to be conquered by satanic ideas.

In other words, becoming a passive instrument for Satan is a culpable act. Sapphira, the wife of Ananias, was aware of (“agreed together”) her husband’s deed and shared his guilt. She too died. Quite possibly neither of them understood that they were obeying a satanic impulse. More probably, they simply wanted to contribute enough to the common fund (4:34-35) so that they would be able to dip into the common pot while having hidden assets on the side as well. By claiming a certain amount as a contribution, they could claim to be impoverished by that amount and then use the figure as the basis for a request of assistance (4:35b). This would have been a misappropriation of funds set aside to promote the physical and even the spiritual welfare of the church (in the sense of the love, the unity, and the relief of emotional distress that come when we are generous to one another).

This incident illustrates the danger of warfare with Satan. His traps can be deadly. We are not told whether the incident just mentioned was unwitting or not. It matters little. The willing heart is insensitive to and cooperates with satanic manipulation, whether the manipulations are discernible or not. Most often, we are aware only of the voice of our own heart. Indeed, the crux of the matter is in the human heart, not in the satanic device.

Everything from a sudden urge to a prolonged agony can be used by Satan to push a person into sin. There is no pressing need, however, to attempt to distinguish between our urges

and those induced by Satan. Whatever the source of the urge, we bear the responsibility for the deed.

Even in the passage where Paul says, "We are not ignorant of his schemes" (2 Cor. 2:11), there is no list of the schemes. The emphasis in the context is that "excessive sorrow" (a condition of the human heart which is usable by Satan) is the pit that Satan can use to "overwhelm" a fellow Christian (2 Cor. 2:7).

The most meaningful way to deal with Satan is not to attempt to catch him planting seeds, but to give him no fertile ground in which to do the planting. This harkens back to Proverbs 4:23 which tells us to "Watch over your heart with all diligence [or above all keeping, as the marginal reading says] for from it flow the springs of life." It is an emphasis that occurs repeatedly in Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:9; Psalm 139:23-24; Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21-23; James 1:12-15. The last of these references tells us that "every one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust" (v. 14). Notice the words, "his own lust."

The clear emphasis is not on what Satan is doing but on what is going on in our own hearts. So, is it war, or is it life? It is both, of course, but the emphasis is on life and the day-to-day issues that come out of life. A study on satanic devices can be instructive, and I will mention a number of them below (in fact, nearly all that speak to the issue), but please note that in each of the passages I will cite the emphasis is on the remedial effects of grace as it is stirred up and lived out in the life, not on some gift of discernment to know the difference between what your heart tells you and what Satan tells you, nor is the emphasis on some dramatic confrontation between you and Satan which you win by quoting Bible verses and pointing the finger into the distance and telling Satan to depart as his blood drips from the two-edged sword of your last quotation.

Lest you think I'm ignoring anything in Scripture which suggests a direct confrontation with Satan, let me refer you

immediately to James 4:7 which tells us that the Devil will flee from us if we resist him. Notice, first, the parallelism in the first part of verse 7, "Submit therefore to God." Submitting to God and resisting the Devil are equivalent concepts. Moreover, everything in the context that might be construed as a means of resisting the Devil is either implicitly or explicitly explained to us in terms of submission to God. In verses 1-3, for instance, James tells his readers that their own lusts were the reason for the fighting that went on among them, for prayerlessness, and for God's refusal to answer when prayers were offered. Their lusts made them a friend of the world and an "enemy of God" (v. 4). Indeed, he tells them in verses 5-6 that the problem was in their own hearts, because our spirit "lusts to envy," or "lusts enviously," the latter translation being the one which I believe best fits the context.

So setting aside lust and pride is the proper means of submitting to God, and since submission to God is equivalent to resisting the Devil, he is to be resisted by the same setting aside of lust and pride. This same line of reasoning is continued in verses 8-11, where the readers are told to purify themselves, and cease from judging and speaking evil of one another. That too is submission to God and resistance to the Devil.

Notice further that the Devil (lit., "accuser") flees when the heart and life are so restored by grace that there is nothing left to accuse the believers about.

Direct confrontation with Satan or his hosts was never the norm in Scripture. This is not to say that it did not happen; rather it was not the chief way of dealing with the spiritual warfare we all face.

Consider Michael the Archangel in Jude 9. Even he did not rebuke Satan. In fact, Jude tells us that he did not dare to do so. Yet we see this being commonly practiced in some circles. A key danger of doing this is that it takes the focus off of the heart (out of which are "the springs of life" [Prov. 4:23]) and

places it on an attempt to control the activities of a supernatural being who is more powerful and more cunning than we are, and who is successful in his temptations because our heart is unwittingly open to his devices. Our sin, our blindness, and our pride conspire to assist him in his manipulation of our heart.

Thus it is the Lord alone who rebukes Satan. (Consider also Zech. 3:2.) I believe it is also significant that there are more references to the Lord rebuking man and nature (circumstance)—and occasionally demons—than there are to Him rebuking Satan. His emphasis (especially where man is concerned) seems to be on dealing with the focal point of ultimate responsibility, rather than in dealing with hidden factors. (You may wish to refer to Ps. 39:11; 76:6; 80:16; 104:7; Isa. 5:2; Nah. 1:4; Zech. 3:2; Matt. 17:18; Mark 4:39; Luke 8:24; Heb. 12:5.)

Moreover, there seems to be a sort of rebuking hierarchy presented in Scripture. On the most basic level, it is very clear in both testaments that we have responsibilities to rebuke one another (Lev. 19:17; Prov. 27:5; Eccl. 7:5; Luke 17:3). A step above this is the responsibility of the elder to rebuke those who need it (1 Tim. 5:20). A third step is rebuking an elder (the officer, the aged—Lev. 19:32, or perhaps both), which is to be softened into pleading with him at least at first (1 Tim. 5:1, 19-20). This instruction appears to be directed to the elder who needs correction, and the instruction to use a plea rather than a rebuke is extended to younger men and women and to older women, as well. This is best understood not as an abrogation of other commands in Scripture to use rebukes (especially since Paul tells him in 5:20 the proper circumstances for using a rebuke), but as the preferred method of approach wherever possible. There is also Paul's rebuke to Peter (Gal. 2:11-21), which is an example of an apostle rebuking an apostle. A fourth step is rebuke (casting out) of demonic forces (Luke 9:1-2, 10; 10:1, 9, 17, 20; and parallels). This latter activity seems to have been done mainly by the apostles (i.e., the Twelve and

the Seventy). Satan, as we have seen, was not to be included in such rebukes by anyone except the Lord.

The "hierarchy of rebuke" that can be deduced from these examples is: (1) Disciple to disciple, (2) Elder to fellow elder and disciple, (3) Apostle to apostle, elder, disciple, and demon, and (4) Jesus to Satan, demon, apostle, elder and disciple. I do not suggest that this is an unbreakable structure, since the authority to rebuke comes ultimately from the Lord and can be dispensed to whomever He wishes, as in the case of a beast rebuking a prophet (2 Peter 2:16). I suggest, however, that this is the norm and should be treated as such.

I also suggest that this "rebuke hierarchy" further assists us in understanding that rebuking Satan or his forces is not the key technique in our spiritual warfare. Everyone needs a method which can be used in any and all circumstances. Keeping the heart is exactly the technique that is called for. Remember, it is war, but in the final analysis it is *not fought like war*; it is lived like life.

Permit me to attempt to make the issue clear in yet another way. I want to show you the stunning scriptural parallels between satanic devices as enumerated by Scripture, and the areas in which we are commanded to keep our heart. First, the passages on keeping the heart:

Deuteronomy 4:9 says, "Only give heed to yourself, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life: but make them known to your sons and your grandsons." Here we are told to remember with the heart, not just the mind.

In the next Scripture *special* discernment is shown to be the task of God, and it too is directed toward our hearts, not toward Satan's devices: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me; And lead me in the everlasting way" (Ps. 139:23-24).

We have already looked at Proverbs 4:23, which tells us that our special task in this warfare is to keep our heart with all diligence, or above all other things which we keep, because everything we do is controlled by our heart.

The next two Scriptures tell us why an unkept heart is such a danger: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders" (Matt. 15:19). And as Mark 7:21-23 puts it:

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.

It is for such reasons that Jesus told Peter (and the others) to "Keep watching and praying, that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38).

Lust, not Satan, is the primary problem, as James 1:12-15 tells us:

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

These lusts are the Satan's territory—territory *you* give him. They are your way of cooperating with him. Normally, all you are aware of is simply wanting to do your own will. His devices are designed to assist you in doing your will rather than God's. That is where his power lies, not in some ability to

overwhelm you with some mind or soul-altering power. Whether Satan has such an ability or not is beside the point; the Scripture makes it plain that "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

In the selection that follows I will classify and analyze twenty-six Scriptures relating to satanic devices. Each is connected directly or indirectly with one or more of the areas in which we are commanded to keep our heart.

We can broadly classify Satan's devices into temptation and injury. Satan uses these devices, not only against individuals, but against the church as a whole. Against the church he uses such tactics as planting false brethren to weaken it internally (Matt. 13:19), and bringing reproach on it to weaken it externally (1 Tim. 3:7). The first falls under the broad category of temptation, the second under injury. Hindrance (1 Thess. 2:18), affliction (1 Peter 5:9), and tribulation (Rev. 2:10) are also injurious devices used to retard the progress of the Gospel in and through the church. Each of these devices prospers because some individual or individuals in and/or out of the church left their heart(s) open to the devices.

Satan also directs his injurious devices against the individual. This includes such things as physical disease (Luke 13:16) and death (Heb. 2:14) or murder (John 8:44, 1 John 3:12). These come not necessarily because of any evil which is already present, but because Satan is often given the right to test us for receptivity to evil (Job 1, 2; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12-13, 17, 19; 5:8-10).

The bulk of his activity, however, takes place in the hearts of individuals and falls under the broad category of temptation. It is in this area that we most clearly see the correspondence between his devices and our own indwelling sin. The remedy is grace, not confrontation. We war by our lifestyle,

not by calling down power out of heaven. His power is already here. We must use it to change. Everything else is a carnal device.

When Satan comes to sift the heart, as he did with Peter (Luke 22:31-32), he probably begins with accusation (Rev. 12:10). These Scriptures tell us that he accuses us day and night and has the power, when he is allowed to use it, to find out exactly what is in our hearts, even to the extent of making a decisive spiritual test of the faith and grace which is there or perhaps only seems to be there. This is why Jesus had to pray for Peter that his faith would not fail. Unless there has been a supernatural undergirding Satan could have brought Peter to ruin, just as he did with Judas.

We therefore note that although the primary battleground is in our hearts, and the primary "tactic" is growth in grace, there is something more at work than simply our own efforts, and that is the Lord's supernatural help. This is vital to our success. When Hebrews 4:14-16 tells us that Jesus cannot only sympathize with us but help us, it is because He successfully resisted temptation, not only in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11) but also throughout His life (Heb. 12:2-4).

In the wilderness temptation of Jesus He succeeded where both Adam and Israel failed. In the first temptation He refused the lusts of the flesh by confessing that the Word of God, not bread, had the power to keep Him alive. Neither delight (as with Adam) nor necessity (as with Israel [Deut. 8:3]) can be satisfied without God's assistance. We experience such temptation in the desire to satisfy some bodily or psychological function or need—sex, hunger, social needs. Each of the three types of temptation overlap somewhat because they often draw us into the same or similar sins, but from somewhat different motives in each case.

The second test appealed to the pride of life, as when Adam wished to be like God, knowing good and evil, or when Israel questioned whether God was among them (Ex. 17:7), both

wishing to draw on God's power for their own ends. We face this in those areas where we want to go beyond ourselves, to be more than we are, and are willing to pay an unlawful and unrighteous price to do so. Ambition at the price of family or morals fits this category. The Scripture enlightened Jesus as to the true nature of the test, and by trust in God He bypassed a quick but deadly solution to the need.

The third test appealed to the lust of the eyes, as when Eve saw that the fruit was pleasant (lit., a desire) to the eyes, or when Israel desired other gods (Deut. 6:13). This was a violation of the tenth commandment, which prohibited covetousness, which is idolatry (Col. 3:5). We most often experience this as the desire to acquire something—love, sex, power—whatever appeals to our desire to possess things. To deal with this temptation, Jesus refused to draw on God's power and promise until God was willing to act on the promise, allowing God to meet His possessive and acquisitive impulses. The God Jesus served had promised Him the kingdoms of the world, but was giving Him a wilderness, so Satan set the kingdoms of the world before His eyes together with himself as a substitute god who could give Him what He wanted. The price was to worship and serve the creature rather than the creator. Jesus refused.

All of this resistance to temptation came not from the mere quotation of Scriptures but from the enlightenment the Scriptures gave to Jesus about the true nature of the temptations and from His determination to live in accord with the Scripture, trusting in God and allowing God to supply His needs when and as God saw fit. Our resistance comes from the same source.

Both with Jesus and with us, Satan's appeal was and is to various types of deep desires which are a part of us. We could classify his assaults as those which dull the perception or those which inflame it.

He dulls our perceptions by snatching away the Word from

our heart (Matt. 13:19) or by blinding the mind (2 Cor. 4:4). When a person forgets what he has heard because he neglects to ponder it, or when he fails to understand it because he wants to color it with his previously held viewpoint, Satan assists his dullness of mind with spiritual amnesia and spiritual blindness. For these purposes he uses lies (John 8:44), trickery (2 Cor. 11:13), and deceit (Rev. 12:9). These may come in the quiet form of what 2 Corinthians 11:14 calls "light" (i.e., a sense of intellectual or even mystical enlightenment); or it may come in the more spectacular form of something miraculous—power, signs, and lying wonders (2 Thess. 2:9).

His inflammatory weapons are equally powerful, perhaps more so in some cases. These are the things which come most readily to mind when we speak of Satan leading us into sin (1 John 3:8) and include "snares" (2 Tim. 2:26) such as appeals to "various impulses" (1 Tim. 3:6), "desires" (John 8:44), and uncleanness (Matt. 12:43), and end with what the Scriptures call "flaming missiles" (Eph. 6:16) which include both the accusations of conscience and/or the ruinous effects of sin ("and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" [James 1:15]).

But again at this point we must ask ourselves, "Is it war, or is it life?" If you will look at the above list of Scriptures which deal with keeping the heart, particularly Matthew 15:19 and Mark 7:21-23, you will find striking parallels between the evil which is resident in our hearts and the schemes Satan uses against us. Look at the following list (duplicate material eliminated):

Carnal Attitude		Satanic Device	
Matthew 15:19	evil thoughts ¹	reproach	1 Timothy 3:7
	murders	murder	John 8:44; 1 John 3:12
	adulteries	desire	John 8:44
	fornications	desire	John 8:44
	thefts		

	false witness slanders	accusation	Revelation 12:10
Mark 7:21-23	covetousness wickedness deceit sensuality envy pride foolishness	desires deceit uncleanness various impulses	John 8:44 Revelation 12:9 Matthew 12:43 1 Timothy 3:6

Where there are blank spaces in this chart you can find satanic schemes from the lists given which give at least an approximate match. I preferred to stick to those which were more obvious. Again, the lesson is that Satan uses as his schemes the things that are already in your heart. It is a war conducted with weapons resident in your own life and heart. Obviously, the only remedy is to eliminate these things by growth in the new life given to us by God—a life which also consists of qualities in the heart—such as those in Galatians 5:22-26: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control," and the like.

But lest we think too humanly in all of this, let us turn again in our thinking to the fact that it is the Lord who promotes the growth of these graces. He planted them; He tends them. This is why Scripture calls them "the fruit of the Spirit." They are supernatural weapons of warfare as surely as signs and miracles or extraordinary providences. God can and does use these if necessary. The major battle in the war, however, is the battle for the town of Mansoul. The "fruit of the Spirit," "the full armor of God," and the like are the deciding factors in this conflict.

Endnotes:

- 1 "Evil thoughts" include harmful discussion, and "reproach" includes railing and reviling, which often are exchanged between individuals. "False witnesses" and "accusation" (below) often have more formal and legal implications.

Author

Scott Souza is a freelance writer and teacher who lives in St. Albans, West Virginia. He has given much time to in-depth biblical research. In 1991 he developed a seminar ministry which introduces people to the whole of Scripture through the use of correlations with chronology, archaeology and world history. In this teaching Scott traces the history of redemption from Genesis to Revelation in order to show the meaning and structure of the Bible.